

Hair Curlers and Sunglasses

A woman just walked by me talking to her sandals. They responded to her words by flopping up against the heels of her feet. First the left then the right or the left first then the right. I was the closest person to her and I could not decipher a word she said so I concluded that it must be the sandals to whom she spoke. It was difficult for the sandals to get a word in edge wise because the woman bantered on and on, interrupting whatever they said. She seemed upset about something but her voice was so inaudible that I listened no further. She was wearing a wrinkled pink housedress that looked as if it had been covering furniture in an attic for some time. She was also wearing sunglasses that shaded her words and bright red haircurlers that had stayed out of the conversation.

Sunday in the Park

On Sunday, visitors to the city park were shocked and horrified to find all the ducks, that resided in the pond surrounding the bandstand, dead. Most were found in the water floating limply on their sides, moving with the current. The rest were flopped down on the pond's edge, heads pressed against the mud, as if basking in the sun. A soft breeze carried feathers across the lawn while flies flew in zig zag patterns over the wake. An appalled park commissioner called for a full investigation into the matter. The popcorn stands braced themselves for a depression while parents told children that they (the ducks) were only sleeping and that the seal could balance a ball on his nose.

-- Phil Barber

Providence RI

Still Life (With Apples)

-- for DeWitt Hardy

1.

A man shipped apples for five years. It was like shoving the freight cars down the rails with the pressure of his forehead, apples from his orchards in Wisconsin, into the western states and the western Canadian territories, toted the figures in ledgers,

and in his best year made only a hundred dollars profit, though his idea of expenses was generous: after five years of it he quit. I was he, my forehead as if polished like an apple, pushing my five years like solid rectangles which weighed tons yet slid ahead my sore head. The effort consumed me and the profit was too small. I couldn't help it, I quit. So, apples, out of an orchard, shipped west on freight trains, today in aluminum trailer trucks rolling over the inter-states, life's broad gray highways, wind, rain, sun, somebody else's.

2.

I looked for my familiar pain and it was gone. Right away I resurrected the actress whose face had preyed on my memory many eons, moons, or eras, and when her face to me appeared and as a forefinger of her transparent hand returned a little tress of hair back somewhere, absolutely nothing happened, nothing happened, as if where once had stood a stunted tree all alone on a field of juniper and outcropped stone, was sand, mere desert, merely bare, and cratered like white candy, like moonscape, like comic book shock, five-pointed white stars shooting across a black sky, and exclamation points, planets wearing boasts of satellites, ouch! sob! yikes! I missed the wholeness I had had when I still had my sorrow. Now I was like ... I was like nothing. I was like dead.

3.

Standing on the platform at the railroad station -- I talked to a chubby little black-haired girl I used to know -- I asked her questions -- five of them -- one right after the other -- getting straight answers -- how do they ship apples -- how marijuana -- and then became aware I might really be asking where my actress was -- if or when she was ever coming back. I slung my head. I was ashamed, looked up, stopped talking, went away, and then came back. There was dirt on the walls from everywhere and the posters boasted New York shows I would never see. How the air hurried! A train was coming. Should I get her drunk, try to make love? I even surprised myself half-desiring her. Then the air brakes screamed out and I saw all the faces at the row of windows reading things, watching things, talking.

4.

I stood at the station because I didn't believe myself. I wondered what I wanted to know, what I wanted to do, who I wanted to have, and lied to myself for answer. I didn't want anything and therefore didn't know anything and so a life is a lie to itself. Tinny and weak, a tininess cried to me I didn't want to want to die, and yet the smoke and smell and noise of the train blocked off the cold air, whatever desolate wind sent a desolate, crumpled page scraping somewhere. The doors opened with many bangs and clangs, like traps in scaffolds, and I hung on as all that was busy and warm swarmed over me.

5.

Still life, still live, like an apple on a table, a bowl, a cloth, and everywhere out incredible life.

The Split

1.

Standing around the desk, looking at the record player playing Red Army songs, a friend, an aficionado, dropped in, stood around for a moment and grinned at the tenor's appassionato: "That's Jan?" he asked me, inclining his head in happiness. "Yah!" I answered. Just then Department Secretary came in with a message: the next poet I was bringing was scheduled to read in Hill Gymnasium. "What?" I asked her, visions of transparent blackboards, hoops, escalator benches, waxed hardwood floors adance in my head: choose your partner, do-si-do! "Whose," I wondered, "idea was that?" "In the first place, Mister So-and-so," (my name) "both auditoriums are scheduled or closed, and Sandy Callahan" (of Student Activities & Affairs) "suggested the gym might be a good place to hold your poets." She left and in front of my class I kicked over the wastepaper basket, threw my eraser and the chalk, and wiped the books off the table. After that I cussed out Sandy Callahan, glowered at them and said. "I don't give a shit. None of those fuckers got candles can stay lit in my spit."